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Viewing cable 06BEIRUT2353, MGLE01: LEBANESE PM SINIORA: "WE NEED HELP."

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06BEIRUT2353	2006-07-13 11:01	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Beirut

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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 002353

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/SINGH/HARDING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/13/2016
TAGS: [IS](#) [IZ](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE01: LEBANESE PM SINIORA: "WE NEED HELP."

SUMMARY

11. (S) Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora expressed deep concern to the Ambassador this morning that the current security crisis is unfolding "as if by script," with Israel and Hizballah dutifully playing out the assigned roles one would expect in a worst case scenario path to regional war. He argued that the only possible way to salvage the situation will be for the GOL to "change the script" by dissociating the GOL from Hizballah's actions, asserting the Lebanese government's responsibility for security in the south, maintaining peace along the Blue Line, respecting all relevant international resolutions, and soliciting United Nations support to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the current crisis. Siniora also criticized Israel's military response over the past 24 hours as "disproportionate" and "unhelpful," and he requested USG and international assistance in asking the Israelis to scale back their military assault and lift the air and sea blockade of Lebanon. Siniora argued that Israel's response plays into the hands of Hizballah and Damascus and is paving the way for a Syrian re-occupation of Lebanon. Siniora and the Ambassador discussed international diplomatic initiatives to resolve the crisis, including a German offer to serve as an intermediary between Lebanon and Israel. Siniora also said that a Presidential statement from the UNSC would be beneficial -- even if critical of Lebanon -- and could explore the possibility of using UNIFIL renewal as a tool to reassert control in the south. The mood in the Grand Serail was grim today, and as the meeting was breaking up, Siniora leaned close to the Ambassador and flatly whispered, "We need help." End Summary.

CONCERNED BY RAPID ESCALATION,
SINIORA SUGGESTS A STRONG GOL RESPONSE

12. (C) On the morning of July 13, the Ambassador and emboff called on Prime Minister Siniora at the Grand Serail. The British Ambassador to Lebanon, James Watt, was present in the meeting as well. As the Prime Minister sat down, he complained that Israel's strong military response has been counterproductive and is uniting the Lebanese people behind Hizballah. He then said he is planning a strong government response of his own however, and had scheduled a Council of Ministers meeting for that afternoon. In it, he said he would push for a strong statement "dissociating" the GOL from Hizballah's actions. Siniora also told the Ambassador that the only way to "change the script" and take the initiative away from Hizballah is to push for a unified GOL position asserting the government's sole authority for security in south Lebanon, calling for a cease-fire along the Blue Line, respecting all relevant international resolutions, and soliciting United Nations support to negotiate an immediate, mutual cease-fire with Israel. The Ambassador asked the Prime Minister if he had publicly made such a statement yet. Siniora replied, "No, but I will." He added that he had made a statement last night dissociating the government from Hizballah's actions, but recognized that in the face of the significant escalation from both sides that took place this morning, he would need to take a stronger, more comprehensive position.

13. (C) Siniora then returned again to the topic of Israel's punishing military response this morning, and complained that they were making the situation worse with "disproportionate" actions that were uniting Arab opinion behind Hizballah and against Israel. "They are crippling our economy, killing our people, they are going to take us back twenty years. This does not help." In response, the Ambassador suggested that it would be important for the GOL to credibly distance itself from Hizballah's assaults if they hoped to temper the severity of Israel's retaliation.

A HIZBALLAH PROXY FOR THE
SYRIAN-IRANIAN ENDGAME

14. (C) The Prime Minister acknowledged as much, but said he was concerned about Syria and Iran as well. The Prime Minister's chief of staff, Ambassador Mohammad Chattah, said that Hizballah's recent campaign was obviously conducted for the benefit of Syria and Iran, "They want to distract

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attention from the UNIIIC investigations and the nuclear issue. That's the only explanation for why Hizballah would do this after they've been assuring us they would be quiet." The Prime Minister took it one step further, adding, "They knew what the result of this would be. They saw Gaza, they knew how the Israelis would react. This isn't about trading prisoners at all, even if that is the declared objective." The Ambassador asked, in that case, what the Prime Minister thought the Iranian - Syrian endgame is. Siniora sighed, "They want to break our government and delay the tribunal," acknowledging that after crippling the Lebanese government, Syria would then re-invade to "save" Lebanon from Israel. He added that Iran also wants to open a front on Israel's northern border to distract from the mounting tensions regarding its own nuclear program.

ATTEMPTS AT RESOLUTION

15. (C) Siniora thanked the Ambassador for the Secretary's remarks yesterday, and said that he had also talked twice to United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan. He said that Annan was considering sending an envoy to Lebanon to help mediate the crisis. Siniora said he would prefer "someone who understands the region," suggesting Terje Roed Larsen, although he was aware that Annan is considering two other candidates first. Siniora also said that he talked to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and the Saudi government yesterday as well, adding that Prince Saud gave strong support by telling Siniora that they should not allow "any organization (e.g. Hizballah) to undermine sovereign national Arab security."

16. (S) Siniora also revealed an offer he said he had received from Germany yesterday to serve as an intermediary in negotiations between Lebanon and Israel. UK Ambassador Watt said he thought it was a good idea, and that if the Israelis were receptive, it would serve as useful and discreet back channel. But, the UK Ambassador said, it is far from clear that the Israelis are in any mood for such an initiative. The Ambassador underscored the point, expressing reservations. The Prime Minister's special assistant, Rola Nouredine, pointed out that they would have to be careful in setting up the back channel so that it doesn't look like they are trying to negotiate a prisoner release, which would be interpreted as a victory for Hizballah, or at least a GOL endorsement of Hizballah's plan.

17. (C) Mohammad Chattah raised the possibility of a UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) on the situation. Ambassador Watt noted that any UNSCR would inevitably include a condemnation Hizballah's actions as well. Prime Minister Siniora responded by saying that at this point, a supportive statement from the UNSC Presidency would be better than a UNSCR. Siniora suggested that with UNIFIL renewal on the table, perhaps the UNSC President could look at UNIFIL renewal as a tool to reassert control in south Lebanon. Even if the UNSC presidency statement would contain sharp criticisms of Lebanon as well as calling for Israeli restraint, Siniora said, he still thought action in New York would be helpful.

HELP ON BLOCKADE

18. (C) Soon after the Ambassador left the meeting, Siniora called by phone to say that he had forgotten to mention a key point. Israel's announced air and sea blockade of Lebanon, he said, was "pushing us all into the arms of Syria." "Syria is becoming our lungs," he said; "we can only breathe through the Syrians." He urged that the U.S. press the Israelis to lift or at least lighten the blockade. He also passed on one specific request: the Lebanese want to get six empty jets (five belonging to MEA and a sixth) out of Beirut and to Larnaca. Siniora expressed hope that the U.S. could at least get the Israelis to allow the airport to function for 60-90 minutes to evacuate the planes. (Siniora claimed that the runways could be temporarily patched quickly, in order to allow the departure of the planes.)

FELTMAN